

Images of Organisational Culture

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The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts Masters degree in Industrial Psychology 2007.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted in partial requirement, for the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Masters), at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other university or institution.

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Date of submission – 13 December 2007

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research report to my grandfather, Ernest Van Rayne and my cousin Wade Van Rayne who have both past on.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people without whose assistance this research report would not have been possible:

My supervisor, Doctor Karen Milner, for her guidance, support, encouragement and valuable input.

My family, for their encouragement in my academic career and future endeavours.

And in particular, to Dominic Mac Donald whose support and inspiration assisted me to withstand the obstacles that I had to endeavour during this gratifying but stressful year.

Abstract

The present study aimed to explore employee images of organisational culture within a South African organisation. In order to investigate the aim of the present study, the following research question was put forward. What, if any, insights do the images elicited from the employees provide about the culture of the organisation. The present study is classified as a qualitative, non-experimental, and an ex-post facto design. A sample of seven employees from the organisation was interviewed using an explorative technique, which made use of metaphors. The results of the present study indicated that the case study organisation's culture could be assessed and accessed by means of metaphorical language.

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Chapter One

Introduction

South African organisations are faced with the challenge of instilling the type of organisational culture that endorses positive change within the organisation. Different researchers have found that the dominant language used by change agents, to express how and what changes are to take place may hinder or promote transformation efforts (Morgan, 2001; & Sackman, 1989). A relatively new approach to understanding organisational culture is to use metaphors to describe what culture may mean (e.g. Morgan, 1986; Alvesson, 2002; Ricketts & Seilling, 2003; Sackmann, 1989; Musson & Tietze, 2004). Thus, the aim of this study is to identify metaphors in organisational discourses as a way of accessing and assessing organisational culture.

Organisational culture is an extremely complex phenomenon. This complexity can mainly be attributed to the lack of consensus amongst theorists in terms of a single or precise definition of organisational culture (Smircich, 1985; Schneider, 1990; Renisch, 1990; Kennedy, 1991; Phesey, 1993). Even though the term organisational culture can be found in both psychological and managerial literature it is often poorly understood (Raveh, Shenkar, & Weber, 1996). For this reason, it is imperative that key research within the realm of understanding organisational culture be explored. Thus, this report will begin with an exploration of organisational culture and will address some of the debates, controversies, approaches, and research that have been associated with this construct. Secondly, the current research focuses on the role of metaphors in the analysis

of organisational culture. In order to access these metaphorical insights of organisational culture a set of in-depth interviews were conducted and analysed by means of a thematic content analyses, which is discussed in the methodological discussion below. The results and discussion of the research are combined in order to clarify the interpretations of the results of the organisation's culture and lastly the limitations and future research implications will be discussed.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Organisational Culture

In reviewing the literature on organisational culture it became evident that different researchers have chosen to define organisational culture differently and these differences are not merely related to a play on semantics but have theoretical implications (Morgan, 1986; Smircich, 1985; Schneider, 1990; Martin, 2002). In addition to a lack of consensus with regards to how organisational culture is defined there remains the debate as to whether an organisation has one unifying culture or variety of subcultures (Martin, 2002). Therefore, the following discussion highlights some of the theoretical viewpoints regarding researchers' orientation to the above debate.

Three Theoretical Views of Cultures in Organisations

Culture is defined by Sathe (1985) as a "set of important understandings (often unstated) that members of a community share in common" (p. 6). This definition places emphasis on the notion that culture is shared. However, Martin (2002) challenged the idea of a single organisational culture, and argued that organisational culture can be viewed from three theoretical standpoints. These are: integrative, differentiation and fragmentation.

The integration perspective suggests that there is one unifying organisational culture.

Researchers who adopt this viewpoint emphasise the notion that organisational culture is

shared (Ouchi, 1981; Sproull, 1981; Siehl & Martin, 1984; Sathe, 1985; Louis, 1985; Schein, 1985, 1999; O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell, 1991). According to Sathe (1985) and Louis (1985) for example, organisational culture is defined in terms of meanings or understandings that are shared. Louis (1985) for example defines culture as a “set of understandings or meanings shared by a group of people. The meanings are largely tacit among the members, are clearly relevant to a particular group, and are distinctive to the group” (p. 74). In line with the integrative perspective, organisational culture theorists have identified various types of organisational culture (Harrison, 1972; Pheysey 1993; Brown, 1996). Due to practical limitations it would be difficult to discuss all of the types of organisational culture identified in the literature. Therefore a few examples will be presented for illustrative purposes.

Pheysey (1993) discusses four types of organisational cultures, namely: a role culture, an achievement culture, a power culture and a support culture. An organisation which has an autocratic, hierarchical setting is an example of a role culture. A role culture stresses the importance of conformity and this type of culture is predominately found in large organisations such as governmental organisations (Pheysey, 1993). The role culture presumes that employees work more effectively and efficiently when the work they are doing is not complicated and when there are clear and precise rules on how to complete a task. Pheysey (1993) asserts that “clarity and precision of roles and procedures are striven for in order to fit the parts of the organisation together like a *machine*” (p. 17).

A second type of organisational culture is the achievement-orientation culture. The achievement-orientated organisation is extremely demanding and employees are expected to do their best and to spend a majority of their time at the organisation. One of the assumptions of this culture is that an employee enjoys doing the type of work that is “intrinsically satisfying” (Pheysey, 1993, p. 17). An achievement culture is commonly rooted in smaller organisations, such as a family store. Emphasis is placed on getting the work done rather than the following of rules and procedures (Pheysey, 1993). In the achievement culture all the members of the organisation have a vested interest in seeing the work being done.

The third culture type is a power culture. In contrast to the achievement culture, in a power culture some people are “dominant and others subservient” (Pheysey, 1993, p. 17). The leaders in this type of organisation are viewed as knowledge reservoirs that hold all the power. The leader-employee relationship is one that resembles a parent-child relationship (Pheysey, 1993). Employees are expected to be submissive and deviance is avoided due to fear.

The support organisation is the fourth culture and it is based on friendliness, respect, and inclusion. The basic premise of this approach is that employees will work because they have strong ties to the social unit or organisation. Individuals’ motivation to work is rooted in the idea that they are doing it for their personal interests as well as for the interests of the group (Pheysey, 1993).

The ways in which organisational culture is depicted in the discussion above, can also be described in terms of images or pictures. To illustrate, the first example of an organisational culture presented by Pheysey (1993), the role culture, elicits an image of a machine with different parts working together to keep the machine functioning.

Metaphors and “mental pictures can be used to conceptualise, understand, and explain vague or unfamiliar phenomena” such as organisational culture (Sackmann, 1989, p. 463). Thus, it appears that organisational culture lends itself to depiction in terms of images and the use of images and metaphors in organisational analysis will be discussed below. Martin (2002) presented the following metaphor to depict this view: “from an integration perspective, culture is like a solid monolith that is seen the same way by most people, no matter from which angle they view it” (p. 94). According to the integrative approach any deviations from the “norm” are viewed as a negative facet, such as stress and performance decreases (e.g. Katz & Kahn, 1978). Thus, it is argued that if any deviations emerge they need to be addressed by employing human resource interventions in order to get the deviants aboard (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Porras & Collins, 1994; Schien, 1999).

Martin (2002, p. 96) asserts that “critics of the integration view argue that if a study claims to represent the culture of an entire organisation, then all kinds of organisational employees should be studied, whether as informants in an ethnographic study or a stratified, random sample, more likely in a quantitative study”. In light of this, the present study includes all the employees currently working in the organisation. Additionally, critics of the integrative approach challenge its image of a unified, harmonious, and

homogeneous organisation and maintain that it is difficult to uphold, particularly given the inconsistencies, interruptions, disputes, and equivocality in today's organisations. Numerous supporters of the integration approach respond to this critique by asserting that there might be disagreements at a superficial level but an in-depth understanding of the organisation's culture should reveal a "shared basic assumption" (Schein, 1985, p. 27). Schein (1991) encapsulates the integration approach as follows:

What this "model" does say, however, is that only what is shared is, by definition, cultural. It does not make sense, therefore, to think about high or low consensus cultures, or cultures of ambiguity or conflict. If there is no consensus or if there is conflict or if things are ambiguous, then, by definition, that group does not have a culture with regard to those things (p. 247-248).

In contrast to the integrative perspective, the differentiation perspective highlights contradictory understandings of organisational culture (Boland & Hoffman, 1983; Gregory, 1983; Barley, 1986; Bell, 1990; Bartunek & Moch, 1991; Alvesson, 1993; Brunsson, 1995). The inconsistent manifestations are termed subcultures. These subcultures are present in concordance or in conflict with other subcultures (Martin 2002). This theoretical perspective is articulated in terms of a metaphor by Martin (2002): "subcultures are like islands of clarity in a sea of ambiguity" (p. 94). Unlike the integration perspective the differentiation perspective does not view inconsistency negatively. For example, during planned change initiatives organisations value groups

who are willing to accept change and rebel against traditional culture manifestations which are in conflict with the 'new' culture.

Differentiation research concentrates on cultural manifestations that have inconsistent interpretations (e.g. Brunsson, 1986). To illustrate, Riley (1983) studied two consulting organisations wherein specialists valued solidarity and collaboration (espoused values). On the contrary, the researcher observed that the dominant language used by employees was filled with metaphors of antagonism and stern competition:

“The interviews were filled with images of cards and players, wars, teams, battles, armies, pugilistics, and wounds. Game (with particular emphasis on sports) and military (with a vicarious interest in espionage) scenarios repeatedly emerged along with a discerning sense of their use” (p. 247).

Van Maanen (1991) and Barley (1986) found that various subcultures emerge among various work-related sections. Occasionally, “subculture differentiation proceeds along horizontal (functional) or vertical (hierarchical) lines, whereas in other organisations context-specific subcultures may emerge based on networks of personal contact at work, friendships, or demographic identities (such as race, gender, ethnicity, or gender)” (Martin, 2002, p. 103).

This does not imply that subcultures will without a doubt emerge because of the above mentioned sources of differentiation found in various research, as this is not always the

case. Various research studies adopting the differentiation approach accentuate fairly pleasant relations amid subcultures (e.g. Trice & Beyer, 1993), while other research studies, written from a more critical theory perspective (Alvesson, 1993), accentuate contradictions (e.g. Brunsson, 1985) and disputes among subcultures at diverse levels of an organisational hierarchy (e.g. Mumby, 1988; Rosen, 1985), highlighting the different ideologies adopted by researchers.

Finally, the fragmentation perspective focuses on cultural materialisations that cannot be expressed in terms of being uniform or contradictory (Martin 2002). In contrast to the differentiation perspective where a pattern of culture emerges that is consistent within the group, no clear pattern is found in the fragmentation perspective, a perspective which is wrought with ambiguity. It incorporates unrecognisable conflicts among oppositions, at times depicted as ironies, paradoxes, or contradictions (e.g. Alvesson, 1993; DiMaggio, 1997; Gherardi, 1995; Hatch, 1997; Koot, Sabelis, & Ybema, 1996; Meyerson, 1991a, 1991b, 1994; Risberg, 1999; Sabelis, 1996; van Merrewijk, 1996; Westra, 1996). The fragmentation perspective asserts that a common understanding is only present when issues arise. A metaphorical expression of the fragmentation perspective would resemble a group of people in a culture who each have a flashlight. When an issue arises (such as an introduction of a new system) those who are interested or disturbed by change will switch their flashlights on. While this is taking place some people are not aware or not concerned about the issue will not have their flashlights turned on. A new issue will result in different flashlights being turned on. From afar, “patterns of light would appear and disappear in a constant flux, with no pattern repeated twice” (Martin 2002, p. 94).

The three theoretical perspectives of organisational culture provide insight as to how organisational culture manifests in organisations. Although these theoretical perspectives are used in isolation by most researchers, Martin (2002) does argue that all three perspectives could be used in a single study of organisational culture and this amalgamated approach will be adopted for the purpose of this study. Thus Martin's (2002) informal definition of organisational culture will be adopted:

“When organisations are examined from a cultural viewpoint, attention is drawn to aspects of organisational life that historically have often been ignored or understudied, such as the stories people tell to newcomers to explain “how things are done around here,” the ways in which offices are arranged and personal items are or are not displayed, jokes people tell, the working atmosphere (hushed and luxurious or dirty and noisy), the relations among people (affectionate in some areas of an office and obviously angry and perhaps competitive in other place), and so on. Cultural observers also often attend to aspects of working life that other researchers study, such as the organisation's official policies, the amounts of money different employees earn, reporting relationships, and so on. A cultural observer is interested in the surfaces of these cultural manifestations because details can be informative, but he or she also seeks an in-depth understanding of the patterns of meaning the link these manifestations together, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in bitter conflicts between groups, and sometimes in webs of ambiguity, paradox, and contradiction” (p. 3).

The majority of cultural research has tended to adopt one of the three theoretical viewpoints described above. However for the purpose of the present study all of the three theoretical viewpoints will be drawn upon. Taking all of the above into consideration, recently, research undertaken in the field of organisational culture has been criticised, especially from a postmodernist perspective. Thus, a few of those critical perspectives will be highlighted.

Postmodern Pictures of Organisational Culture

Postmodernist research questions modern notions of organisational culture and raises important considerations which need to be acknowledged when undertaking research and particularly the present research, relating to organisational culture. Organisational culture can be viewed as a variable or as a root metaphor, with the root metaphor being posed as an original theoretical understanding of organisations. Postmodernism questions this distinction and asserts that they both become entrapped in modernist ventures for depth, distinctiveness, and meaningful behaviours. “From a postmodern point of view, cultural forms such as rituals, stories, metaphors, and the like appear isolated from the fragments of meaning created by the members of the organisation in the perpetual present” (Schultz, 1992, p. 18). Thus, postmodernism questions the modern notion of cultural manifestation such as rituals. In particular, whether the meaning of a ritual is in a state of flux or not, which would mean that it is discontinuous and may lead to ambiguous interpretations or loss of meaning. For example, a formal meeting with ones’ superiors may on one occasion be interpreted as a hostile environment, characterised by power battles, and on

another occasion be interpreted as a sign of reciprocal commitment. Or the employees may disagree on: some may be uncertain, some may have a clear understanding of what is happening, and others may disagree. Thus, no fixed meaning exists (Martin & Mayerson, 1988). These various viewpoints are addressed more recently by Martin (2002) and have been discussed above.

Another critique of organisational culture research is provided by Schultz (1992) who argues that the “reiteration of the logo, the ceremonial construction of basic values, the repeated story, *and the ongoing metaphor* are the organisational model of the corporate culture – not some hidden pattern of meaningful interpretations” (p. 18). These postmodernist challenges of the modern notions of organisational culture by no means diminish the need for research in this field but rather highlight the need to take a critical look at traditional views of organisational culture, which assert that the culture can be manipulated by management at will – as in classical organisational management theory (Schultz, 1992).

In order to unravel the complex understandings of what organisational culture is, some researchers have chosen to adopt metaphors (see Oswick & Montgomery, 1999; Morgan, 1986; Kaarst-Brown & Robey, 1999; Erdem & Satir, 2003). In addition to the above postmodern critiques on organisational culture research Martin (2002) identified a number of the methodological challenges faced by researchers who choose to do research on this topic. The following five questions presented by Martin (2002, p. 206) highlight

the methodological challenges encountered by researchers in the field of organisational culture:

- 1) Is culture an objective or subjective phenomenon?
- 2) Can culture be understood from an outsider or etic point of view, or does an insider or emic viewpoint generate more insight?
- 3) Is generalisation (or at least comparisons across cultures) desirable and possible, or is cultural understanding necessarily context specific?
- 4) Is breadth of cultural manifestations studied unimportant or essential?
- 5) Is depth of interpretation the single most important indicator of the quality of a cultural study, or are other quality criteria (such as appropriate comparisons) more essential?

It has been argued above that “culture reflects a social construction of reality unique to its members of a social unit, and that this uniqueness makes it impossible for standardised measures to tap cultural processes” (Schneider, 1990, p. 174). Thus, for the present research, it is anticipated that the use of images and metaphors will allow one to explore the ways in which organisational culture is experienced by employees in a South African organisation. It should be noted that this is an explorative study based on a novel approach. It is anticipated that this form of metaphorical analysis will provide insight into the organisation’s culture, and enable the researcher to build on previous literature and explore the usefulness of the concept of metaphor/image and other linguistic devices as a

tool for describing organisational culture and to facilitate organisational change processes.

Images and Metaphors

The need for transformation of South African organisations has been acknowledged at the various stages of the South African economy. At a national, policy-making level the need for transformation has been recognised in various forms of legislation and policy – notably legislation relating to Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and employment equity legislation. At an organisational level there has also been a growing recognition of the need for transformation; partly in response to the broader legislative environment but also in response to the increasing diversity of the South African workplace. Thus, transformations within organisations are not only driven by the need to remain internationally competitive and to survive but also to conform to these various forms of legislation. Organisational transformation includes more than simply changing a few organisational aspects such as the furniture and recruiting more people, it involves more evolutionary steps. Therefore, changing the culture of the organisation lies at the core of a proper transformation effort and should include but not be limited to the following: a change in basic assumptions, shared understandings, beliefs, and behaviours within the organisational context (Schein 1985; Sackmann, 1986; Ricketts & Seiling, 2003). A relatively recent trend in international literature on organisational analysis has been to explore organisational change and transformation from the perspective of organisational metaphors, images and other linguistic tropes (e.g. Morgan, 1986; Alvesson, 2002;

Ricketts & Seilling, 2003; Sackmann, 1989; Musson & Tietze, 2004). Metaphorical research can aid these transformation efforts by “uncovering perceptions, attitudes and feelings which until released by metaphor were previously subconscious or unarticulated” (Oswick & Montgomery, 1999, p. 14). Various authors have utilised the metaphorical approach to understanding organisations differently (e.g., Sackamann, 1989; Palmer & Lundberg, 1995; Grady, Fisher & Fraser, 1996; Lynn & Robey, 1999; Oswick & Montgomery, 1999; Gibson & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2001; Lennon & Wollin, 2001; Morgan, 2001; Erdem & Satir, 2003; Massey, 2003; Ricketts & Seilling, 2003; Musson & Tietze, 2004; Gross & Hogler, 2005). A review of these variations will be presented below.

Sackmann (1986) for example explored the role of metaphors in organisational transformation. She argues that metaphors can be a powerful tool for transformation because they can “(1) trigger a perceptual shift, (2) succinctly transmit a large amount of information simultaneously at a cognitive level and (3) render vague and abstract ideas concrete, provide a vivid image and be remembered easily” (Sackmann, 1986, p. 482). By the same token, differences in metaphors for organisational transformation imply different processes and outcomes (Sackmann, 1986) as well as differences in understanding, acceptance and commitment to organisational transformation among different groupings within the organisation. Sackmann (1986) presents two types of metaphors which can be usefully adopted during organisational transformation, namely: a targeted metaphor and an adaptive metaphor. A targeted metaphor is appropriate for change processes towards stated goals. Whereas the latter metaphor, an adaptive metaphor, is appropriate for transformation processes that do not have pre-specified goals

and in which direction is sought and constantly evolving. An example of a targeted metaphor is the depiction of organisations as machines. By adopting a machine metaphor the importance of structure, efficiency, and control are emphasised whereas the adoption of an organism metaphor highlights aspects of organisation functioning with regards to environmental influences. Therefore, if the goal of an organisation is to maintain a highly structured work environment which is characterised by a role culture, for example then a machine metaphor could be used. The metaphor adopted directly influences the type of transformation to take place as well as the level of transformation. Gergen (1999) argues that: “if the machine is our metaphor for the ideal organisation, we are likely to divide the organisation into speciality units, in which each person has a specific function (like the parts of an automobile). In contrast, if we view the organisation as a living organism we may be centrally concerned with its health and way the participants function in teams, and coordinate actions in times of stress” (p. 176). An adaptive metaphor is employed if the goal of the organisation is to encourage more creativity, such as an organism metaphor, which does not emphasise the need for highly structured environment but rather emphasises the need to be adaptive. Management can use these types of metaphors and others effectively to communicate their organisational goals. Thus, it has been suggested frequently in the literature that the notion of a metaphor (and other linguistic tropes, such as metonymy, paradox and irony) play an important role in organisational transformation.

Morgan (1986, p. 12) argues that “most conventional ideas about organisation and management build on a small number of taken for granted images, especially mechanical

and biological ones”. For example, Morgan (1986) identifies eight images of organisations, including, organisations as machines; organisations as organisms; and organisations of instruments of domination and explores the vastly differing implications these varying expectations have for organisational analysis and change. Morgan (1993) extended his work on organisational metaphor and included: spider plants, dandelion seeds, termite mounds, and more. However, Boje and Summers (1994) critiqued Morgan’s approach to changing and understanding organisations through metaphors and questioned whether these stories are able to assist one to “see, read or understand social construction; to develop postmodern interpretations; or whether to write or create new change behaviour, as he claims” (p. 2).

Not only do metaphors “describe an external reality; they also help constitute that reality and prescribe how it ought to be viewed”. (Tsoukas, 1991, p. 570). For example, Meadows (1967) contends that “the development of theories of organisation is a history of the metaphor of orderliness” (p. 82). Thus the role of metaphorical thinking is not new but rather a critical tool which can be used to assess and access organisational culture. By choosing to adopt a particular metaphor, such as the culture of the organisations is like a machine one elicits a particular image. Through this image the culture is not just like a machine but rather ‘turns into the machine’. To illustrate, employees may adopt a structured approach to the work responsibilities and communicate in a restricted manner as to adhere to the bureaucratic culture. As a result there may be resistance to doing more than one job since employees are viewed as “cogs in a machine” and thus only responsible for their particular task. Within organisations, “this sense of ‘becoming the

image' demonstrates the power of the metaphor when searching for common ground among differing viewpoints or fractions" (Ricketts & Seiling, 2003, p. 4). The metaphorical perspective allows for the cognisance of novel ways to transfer learning and to increase an awareness of current metaphors in use at the organisation with respect to the meaning portrayed by particular metaphors. Ricketts & Seiling (2003) argue that this type of "metaphoric learning" serves a means to speed up "alignment" with the organisations culture (p. 6).

According to Ricketts and Seiling (2003) culture and language are inseparable and it is argued that a group's peculiar language is cooperatively and mutually developed, producing significant connotation by those employing the language "New words, images, and metaphors arise as a result of perceived needs-internal (improved communication or business processes) and external (responses to a new competitive threat)" (Ricketts & Seiling, 2003, p. 3). The continued use of such language hinges on its ability to meet these needs. Hence, metaphors are regarded as powerful communicative tools. It is thus argued that the language adopted by managers and the pictures of motivation that are created by strategically using these types of linguistic tools serve as a means to begin change processes, contribute to its successfulness and to ensure long-term maintenance thereof (Ricketts & Seiling, 2003).

The preceding discussion clearly indicates that there is a relatively small but fairly powerful body of literature which has begun to explore the role of metaphors in organisational transformation at a conceptual level. In addition, a growing body of

research literature in this area has started to develop. A few examples of this research will now be presented in order to provide an indication of the type of work that is currently being done in this area. For example Oswick and Montgomery (1999) assessed organisational change using metaphors. Their sample consisted of 98 first-line managers and supervisors positioned within the organisation's different production and distribution divisions. The participants were asked to answer two questions which were metaphor-based. The two questions were: 1) If you were asked to compare your organisation to an animal – what kind of animal would it be? – and why? 2) If the organisation was part of a car – what part of a car would it be? – and why? (Oswick and Montgomery, 1999, p. 2). The researchers concluded that by adopting a metaphor-based investigation they were able to not only identify certain aspects of the organisation but they were also able to gauge people's attitude about issues in the organisation. Their findings included an extensive diversity of metaphors, which yielded "41 different animals and 51 different parts of a car" (Oswick and Montgomery, 1999, p. 3). The images of the organisation which were identified by the respondents generated a number of conflicting views, where some respondents equated the organisation to a fast quick to react animal, while others likened it to a slow to react animal. One of the limitations of the study regarded the metaphor-based enquiry used by the researchers. By asking the respondents "how the organisation is like an animal" the responses were limited to the "organisational change process within the organisation" (Oswick and Montgomery, 1999, p. 15). In addition to the second research question, the responses related images of car parts to the organisation's strategy, instead of attaining holistic responses regarding the organisation, which was the larger domain that the researchers were trying to enquire about, the

researchers, were only able to attain information regarding single aspects of the larger domain (i.e. organisational change and strategy). The researchers concluded that organisations are indeed diverse and this was reflected in the responses they generated, which moved from some participants viewing the organisation as adaptable and moving, to some participants viewing it as slow to react. “Many of the views provided by the respondents seemed to be antithetical – so much so that it was difficult believe they were talking about the same organisation. From a postmodernist viewpoint these insights perhaps merely reflect the existence of multiple interpretations of reality” (Oswick & Montgomery, 1999, p. 18). The present research will build on the above study but will not restrict the responses elicited from the participants by providing images but will rather allow participants to choose their own images.

Morgan (2001) on the other hand explored the dominant and alternative ideologies of change reflected in the change metaphors used by management in a retail organisation. The study was qualitative in nature and included observation, interviews and an open ended questionnaire. The results of the study indicated that managers used the corporate call to “get out the box” as an image of organisational transformation in their public discourses but their metaphors being used suggests that they had not filled that term with meaning. This was having a severe hampering effect on the change efforts of the organisation. Gibson and Zellmer-Bruhn (2001) extended the research on metaphors in organisational analysis by undertaking an intercultural analysis of metaphors for the concept of team-work. In this study different metaphors for teamwork were derived from the language team members used during interviews in four different geographical

locations of six multinational organisations. One respondent from the Philippines drew and image of a hut while others referred to a sports metaphor for teams. The Americans on the other hand expressed their understanding of teamwork as a franchise, which emphasised autonomy. Based on their analyses the researchers concluded that the use of the teamwork metaphors varied across countries and organisations. Essentially their findings indicated that “...metaphors demonstrate the usefulness of analysing language to access and study underlying individual meaning structures that are based on national and organisational culture” (p. 15).

Based on the above discussion it can be concluded that metaphors, swiftly and intensely, reveal the insights of the employees in an organisation concerning assumptions, values and practices that are believed to dominant in the organisation (Erdem & Satir, 2003).

Whilst attempting to grapple with the complications, inconsistencies and incongruity in an organisation (Bates, 1984), one can observe the “power of a single metaphor that describes everything (the values behind the practices and the assumptions behind the values)” (Erdem & Satir, 2003, p. 130). Metaphors, in this regard, appear to be capable of exploring a significant amount of variables such as composition, performance, communication, classification, socialisation, rewarding and management which are prevalent in an analysis of organisational culture.

Apart from the images, identified previously, other metaphors have also emerged in the literature, such as: jazz bands and missionaries (Akin & Schultheiss, 1990), clouds and songs (Gergan, 1992), soap bubbles (Tsoukas, 1993), and strategic termites and spider

plants (Morgan, 1993). From the above examples proposed by Pheysey, of the different organisational cultures one could link some of these images to particular cultures. To illustrate, one could argue that an image applicable to a role culture could be the image of organisations as machines. An image that would best be linked to an achievement culture is the image of organisations as an organism. An organisation that adopts a power culture could be described as a political system or as an instrument of domination.

Thus it appears that organisational images, metaphors and other linguistic devices have an important role to play in understanding organisations and the differing groupings that may be found within them. However, there is a lack of research in this field in South Africa. Given the value of metaphors/images with regards to assessing and accessing organisational culture and their value in reducing uncertainty, stress and resistance to organisational change (Abel & Sementelli, 2005), research within the South African context such as this research would prove to be a valuable contribution not only to the research community but also to South African organisations.

The above illustration of how one can extrapolate different images from the type of organisational culture an organisation adheres to is not exhaustive but it merely serves to show how one can use images, as an indicator of the type of organisational culture. Thus, this may also prove to be a useful tool for accessing and assessing organisational culture for the present study.

Research Rationale

The complex nature of undertaking research in the field of organisational culture has been emphasised throughout the literature review. These complexities can be attributed to firstly, the fact that no common definition is agreed upon in the literature in the field of organisational culture (Smircich, 1983; Martin and Siehl, 1983; Schneider, 1990).

Secondly, different theoretical perspectives are adopted by researchers, namely: integration, differentiation and fragmentation (Martin, 2002). All of these complexities link to how the researchers choose to operationalise their definition of organisational culture. For the purpose of this research Martin's (2002) informal definition of organisational culture is adopted. This definition reflects a postmodern understanding of organisational culture, which does not assume a single truth but rather embraces the idea that culture can be fragmented and understandings thereof may differ among employees.

The usefulness of metaphors as a tool to access a deeper understanding of the complex nature of organisational life has been emphasised by numerous researchers (Morgan, 1986; Krantz, 1990; Sackmann, 1986). For example Krantz (1990, p. 242) argued: "the compelling aspect of metaphor is not therefore the mental image itself but the way in which the image reaches into the subjective terrain of unconscious experiences".

Metaphors are thus able to "convey a multitude of interconnected meanings". In addition, Morgan (1986) asserted that by employing metaphor, "we have a means of enhancing our capacity for creative yet disciplined thought, in a way that allows us to grasp and deal

with the many-sided character of organisational life” (p.17). It can therefore be argued that metaphors are valuable tools for exploring organisations and its culture.

A qualitative methodological approach was adopted for the current study in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the organisation’s culture. No attempt will be made to generalise the results of this research. The limitations of a small sample size are acknowledged but the advantage of having every employee participate in this research adds an advantage that cannot be obtained by many other research endeavours due to practical limitations.

Research Question

There are two main objectives of this study: First, it is anticipated that the metaphors elicited from the employees in the organisation will facilitate a deeper understanding of the organisation than may have been achieved through a standardised, quantitative measure of the organisational culture. Second, it is hoped that this study will contribute towards addressing one of the research opportunities identified by Oswick and Grant (1996), with regard to using metaphor as a vehicle for, rather than target of, research.

These objectives lead to the following research question:

1. What, if any, insights do the metaphors elicited from the employees provide about the culture of the organisation?

Chapter Three

Method

Research Design

A qualitative methodology was used in the present study which allowed for a detailed, contextual analysis of the complexities around organisational culture. For the purpose of this research participants from a single South African organisation were interviewed. The intention of the interviews was to gather information regarding the respondents' current organisational culture. From an analysis of the interviews, metaphors or images used to explain the culture or subcultures of the organisation were identified.

This study is a non-experimental ex-post facto design (Ordman, 2001). No forms of manipulation of variables were used in the study nor were any of the participants placed in a control or experimental group. The researcher was interested in understanding individual perceptions of organisational culture and therefore no attempt was made to change the participants' experiences.

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of seven employees who have taken part in individual interviews. Interview questions were developed with the aim of accessing and assessing the metaphors or images utilised by the employees to describe the organisations culture

(refer to Appendix A). These seven employees included all the employees currently working in the organisation. This South African organisation is a Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) consultancy and is currently 50% black empowered. It consists of a diverse team of consultants who all have post-graduate qualifications. There were four white women, two white men, and one black man, between the ages of 29 to 41, in the organisation.

Procedure

Firstly, a letter explaining the nature of the study and asking for assistance from the employees was distributed by the researcher (See Appendix B). Suitable times were arranged with those who responded to a given email address so that the researcher had sufficient time to conduct the interviews while not disrupting the interviewees' work responsibilities. The interviews were conducted in a quiet room with no interruptions.

Before the interviews were conducted a pilot study was done to ensure that the questions are clear. Three people were part of the pilot study. Data was collected by conducting seven semi-structured, in-depth, individual interviews. All the participants were able to be interviewed on the same day and thus not given ample time to discuss what their responses were which may have lead to a bias in the results. The interviews were taped and transcribed with the permission of the participants who each signed a consent form (refer to Appendix D). The participants were informed that if they felt uncomfortable about answering any of the questions they should feel free to not answer the question.

Data Analysis: Content Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic content analysis.

Content analysis is a qualitative research method which involves a process of determining the presence of particular concepts or themes within a specific text and analyses these concepts or themes for the purpose of developing meaning about a particular issue or research topic. Doing a content analysis of text entails either coding the text or breaking it down into categories on different levels, that is, words, phrases, word sense, sentence or theme (de Sola Pool, 1959). Content analysis is used in number of fields, such cultural studies (Berelson, 1971).

The utilisation of content analysis as a research method may involve either an empirical quantitative or an interpretive approach (Eagle, 1998). This study adopts an interpretive approach to research data.

Thematic content analysis

What is a Theme?

Banister et al (1994, p. 57) define a thematic content analysis as a “coherent way of organising or reading some interview material in relation to specific research questions. These readings are organised under thematic headings in ways that attempt to do justice both to elements of the research question and the pre-occupations of the interviewees”.

Once transcribed the text is broken down for phrases and/or sentences which can be regarded as descriptive of the research question.

Ethical Considerations

A South African organisation was approached and permission to do the study in the organisation was requested and granted. Participation in this study was voluntary and in order to conduct the study, consent was firstly obtained from the participants. The interview transcripts were not seen by anyone within the organisation or by any other individuals besides the researcher. No information regarding the identity of the individuals was indicated in the research report.

The participants were not advantaged nor disadvantaged in any manner if they choose to participate or not participate in the study. A letter requesting individual participation in the study was distributed by the researcher (refer to Appendix B). This letter informed the participants on what the study was about and information regarding confidentiality was conveyed. A letter of consent to take part in the study and to be recorded was signed by each participant before the interviews were conducted (refer to Appendix C and D). The tapes and transcripts were destroyed once the study was completed.

Chapter Four

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this section is to present and discuss the results of the study. Firstly, a brief discussion of the organisation's background will be provided due to the fact that the organisation has gone through many changes which may have influenced the results. As mentioned in the methodology section, the understanding of the organisation's context is a key element when undertaking thematic content analysis. The results and discussion section is arranged according to the themes extracted from the interviews by analysing the content. Lastly, the limitations and future research implications of the study will be discussed.

The organisation was small in terms of size, with seven members, in the service industry. It provided professional consulting training facilitation, in both the private and public sector of South Africa. The organisation had its roots in a small consultancy business which started in the 1990's and has gone through various small and large changes over the years. These changes were in terms of size, growth, shrinkage, shareholders, governance structures, and changes in terms of the products and services that it delivers. Thus, the analysis of the transcripts will be done with these changes in mind. Mainly because these changes may significantly impact on how the current employees of the organisation view the culture of the organisation as it currently is.

Once the interviews were conducted, recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed by means of thematic content analysis. A process of determining the presence of particular themes was followed. The themes were based on the metaphors or images elicited during the interviews. This was an emergent process which was partly guided by the literature discussed above and by looking at what themes were dominant in the transcribed interviews. Not only are the metaphors or images discussed but also how the various participants felt about these metaphors or images, which reflected the organisations' culture.

What, if any, insights do the metaphors elicited from the employees provide about the culture of the organisation?

The metaphors that were identified by the participants included a variety of similar as well as diverse images of the organisation's culture. To illustrate, all the participants likened the organisation to a family but their feelings towards this image of the organisation varied significantly. Other images that emerged were as follows:

- Participant 1: saw the organisation as chemistry.
- Participant 2: saw the organisation as a living organism.
- Participant 3: saw the organisation as a puzzle.
- Participant 4: saw the organisation as a family of dogs.
- Participant 5: saw the organisation as a living cell.
- Participant 6: saw the organisation as a village.

- Participant 7: saw the organisation as a cell.

A more detailed discussion of these various images likened to the organisation's culture will be discussed below.

The Organisation as an Animal

Kiezer and Post (1996) have argued that particular types of metaphors tend to emphasise certain characteristics and associations within a specified targeted area. For example, animals, they argue, are “useful to point to the contrast between properties like weakness and strength (e.g. mouse versus elephant) or slowness and speed (snail versus cheetah) (Kiezer and Post, 1996, p. 95).

Participant D drew a picture of a dog with her pups and associated certain attributes of the culture with this image. According to Kiezer and Post's (1996) certain attributes are associated with this image namely: size, speed and growth. *“It's a dog with her pups. So some of those pups have been weaned from the mother figure but some of them are wanting to be more independent and assert their needs more... They're growing up and the mother's been very nurturing very supportive and liked looking after the pups. I think though there are dynamics that occur at this level with the male dog, which is not male as in more dominate but more an equal partner...I think what's happening now and it's quite nice is that because these pups have all grown to a point where they no longer need to suckle, there's now place for new people to come in at that level and be looked after,*

cared for, nurtured, grown and for these people to be more empowered". This metaphor of the dog with her pups further elicits the image of a parent-child relationship. Thus, it illustrates how metaphors can "succinctly transmit a large amount of information simultaneously at a cognitive level" (Sackmann, 1986, p.482). The connotations of size, loyalty, and support conveyed by the above image of dogs depict the 's organisational culture. Firstly, in terms of size it is small and secondly, there is a supportive culture. By choosing a particular image such as puppies an emotional response towards that image can be drawn. For example, the participant could have chosen another image, such as the organisation is like a litter of pigs, which would have evoked a much more negative emotion. Thus, by choosing to describe the organisation as "*a family of dogs with her pups*" a positive image of loyalty and support are emphasised and not untidiness, this would have been associated with choosing the image of pigs.

The following metaphor – the organisation as an organism – which was elicited from another participant in the organisation, produced insight into a particularly aspect of the organisations culture, namely its operational procedures.

The Organisation as an Organism

The primary descriptions which appeared to dominate in the interviews was the choice of images of organisms, and therefore the succeeding metaphorical projections onto the organisation, were the ideas of "*flexibility*" and "*adaptability*". Consequently, emphasising the notion of a flexible and adaptable organisational culture. Organisations

are faced with the challenge of constantly changing, whether it is due to external pressures (e.g. legislation) or internal changes (e.g. new technology), the need to have an adaptable or flexible culture has been emphasised in literature regarding organisational change (Abel & Sementelli, 2005) and thus it could be argued that because the organisation's culture is flexible and adaptable as depicted by the organic metaphors chosen, by four of the participants in the organisation – two males and two females (refer to table 1.1) – it was able to survive the ongoing changes it had experienced and continuous to experience.

Many researchers have identified numerous metaphors that have been used not only to depict a particular view about the organisation but also how metaphors can be successfully employed during change process (Morgan, 1985; Sackmann, 1986; Oswick & Montgomery, 1999). The organic metaphors used to describe the organisation's culture can be classified as adaptive metaphors, which according to Sackmann (1986) is appropriate for transformation processes that do not have pre-specified goals and in which direction is sought and constantly evolving. Therefore the following quote concurs with the difficulty experienced in many organisations especially South African organisations where change and environmental factors make it difficult to have pre-specified goals.

An adaptive metaphor is employed if the goal of the organisation is to encourage more creativity, such as an organism metaphor, which does not emphasise the need for highly structured environments but rather emphasises the need to be adaptive (Morgan, 1985; Sackmann, 1986). An organism metaphor, for example the organisation as a "cell" and a

“living organism”, was predominately used to describe the organisation’s culture, except for one individual who described the organisation as a *puzzle*, which is arguably still an adaptive metaphor, specifically relating to how the individual used this metaphor (as discussed below).

The organism metaphor which was elicited from the employees provided valuable insight about the organisation’s culture and in particular how it influenced the daily operations within the organisation. *“I suppose it is like a living organism, like an organ in your body. So it’s not a machine as in cogs and that kind of thing, there is intelligence involved and I would say that each cell within that organ knows its job but it’s also affected and infected on the situation and external factors. If one of the cells is working well and the other isn’t it depends on how well one cells working and how not well the other cells working. But as a living thing I would compare it to that because there is intelligence involved, it’s not a machine. Each cell within the organ has its own intelligence and its own input that works with the rest”*. This metaphor provided insight to the organisations culture as it highlighted its adaptability especially in relation to environmental inputs and also the way in which everybody is respected and seen as intelligent resources of the organisation. This conclusion is in line with Morgan’s (1986) discussion relating to images of organisation’s as organisms, in which he focuses on an open-systems understanding of organisational operations.

Emphasis was also placed on the organisation being a living thing and not an object. *“It is definitely a living thing not an object it is challenging, it’s moving, it’s going”*. *“I*

suppose like an animal or a human being, continuously growing and developing and learning new things and being conscious". Thus, the organisation was seen as constantly changing. *"So in terms of the question, definitely a living thing, constantly changing and I think it's a good thing because even though it's very hard we are change management specialists, so experiencing what we trying to help people first hand"*. This metaphor emphasised the adaptability of the organisation's culture, which is extremely important when changes are constantly being made, as is the case in this organisation. These findings concur with Sackmann's (1986) conclusions, which highlight the importance of having an adaptable culture, as depicted by an organism metaphor, in constantly changing organisations.

The organisation was also described as chemistry, by Participant A. *"I think it is, if you look at, chemistry and you look at different molecules and you look at atoms and how they mould with one another or actually link with one another and they mould something new.* This statement relates back to the close relationships formed within the organisation. Thus, the metaphor depicts the supportive culture of the organisation. *And you will get to a place when the sum of the individuals is larger than one individual itself. So if you also look at molecules they're very flexible, they can add in a formation like this or they can all add in a formation like this but still I think there is a link the whole time between the people in order to get something there. Ultimately, I think if you look at the typical structure of how these different formulas and things work you can ultimately build something and this may mean that we've got associates, clients, we've got internal people, we've got other resources like books and it can all build something that is*

ultimately visible but it is also something that is able to change. You know, very fast, and flexible, and focused". "You can look at it as this is Joburg and this is Cape Town so there's even molecules running in between the two different spaces... We need to build that molecules so that this entity can be strong enough to feed the energy again into the organisation. But also to make sure that the people we appoint as team members, individually get closer to one another and maybe when they work with (person B) and these people for the moment get closer but never ever be in isolation. In other words what I'm trying to say it still remains a family, so the energy and the moving and the adaptability and the flexibility that can go in different directions are still situated together, still linked together, you know it's not lose pearls it's a necklace of specifically selected people who has got that ability to be adaptive". By choosing to adopt a particular metaphor, such as the organisation is like an organism a specific image is elicited. Through this image the culture of the organisation is not just like an organism but rather turns into the organism. This is in line with Morgan's (1986) assertions of the powerful nature of metaphors or the particular image present within an organisation.

The Organisation as a Village

Participant F described the organisation as a village, *"I think it is like a little village, because I think it is like a family it is like a little village. In terms of the structure, I think there is still a bit of a hierarchy, because of history of this organisation. (Top management was depicted as the chief hut) The chief little hut there giving the instructions and the orders, we do have the freedom, I drew them separately, we do have*

the freedom to go about working in our own way, but we always need to return to the main village, especially this part to get an okay on how we should be doing things... The fire represents for me ultimately where we want to get to with this but I am not sure if everybody has the same view of that, you know, what that fire is and truly share a common vision on how to get there”.

When asking the participants about the organisations culture, they did not simply give a list of the organisations values, which are: ownership, integrity, growth, sense of community, diversity, delight, freedom, and authenticity, and the strength of thereof, which is the type of information that one would have gained by using some of the traditional measures of organisational culture, but through the use of metaphors all of these values were expressed. Thus, proving that the metaphors elicited from the employees provided valuable insight about the culture of organisation by not simply giving a generalist understanding about the organisation’s culture but providing an in-depth understandings which would prove to be more valuable in research pertaining to organisational culture.

Shared Meanings and Understandings

According to the ideational definitions proposed by Sathe (1985) and Louis (1985), organisational culture can be defined in terms of meanings or understandings that are shared. Evidence in the current study of a shared understanding regarding what needs to be done and how it is done, emerged from the analysis of the individual interviews.

“...each person knows what it is that they need to do. So there are specific core functions but over and above the core functions everybody also overlaps on other people.” This shared understanding is also reflected in the fact that nobody within the organisation has a particular job description yet they know or understand what needs to be done. *“The company’s evolved to a point over time, where we all know exactly what’s required, if you’re ever confused you just ask someone... whoever has the work to do, will have a sit down meeting and they will say this is what needs to be accomplished by when and we will split the work so the tasks are split to whoever’s core competency it is”.*

Shared Values of the Organisation’s Culture

Having an integrative culture demonstrates a shared understand of what the organisation stands for and this shared understanding emerged from the interviews. *“...when I talk about values from a client point we act from a responsible place we don’t sell things that we don’t think are going to work we not just out there to make money, we’re there to help and we’re there to add value and that’s always for me the place to work from. The principles underpinning our methodology are things like empowerment and inclusion. So we empower our clients, we transfer skills we don’t hold all our information and go no we’re the experts...”* So what is the value of having a strong culture? It is argued that a strong culture produces shared agreements by strong types of societal control or more elusive ways of promoting “intentional” compliance through shared values (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Ott, 1989; Ouchi & Jaeger, 1978; Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Porras, 1987; Porras & Collins, 1994).

Flexible and Adaptable Nature of the Organisation's Culture

It can be argued that the organisation has a strong culture. A strong culture emerges when core values and beliefs are shared among the members of the organisation (Robbins, 2003).

All the participants agreed that the organisation is flexible, *"I think we have a very flexible and adaptable culture, definitely performance driven, there's no rigid typical rules and regulations in terms of normal corporate because it is a small organisation..."*, and that there is a culture of freedom within the organisation, *"for this organisation there is a culture of freedom, whatever task you are set to do you must really do it the way you think, in order to produce results, you have the freedom to decide how you want to do it when you want to do it and all the rest, so that's what's great about this particular job, you have full freedom, also in terms of working at the office or not"*.

Related to the flexibility of the organisation is the shared understanding that there is no micro-management. *"So it's a stressful environment there's a lot going on but there are also quiet times and they don't expect you to sit at your desk and twiddle your thumbs which is great. It's not a clock watching business..."*

Family Metaphor

A simplistic understanding of the culture either being uniform or contradictory does not encompass the complexity of the perceptions of the organisation's culture as expressed in the interviews. Thus, by uncritically interpreting the use of the metaphor one may fail to

realise that although all the participants used a family metaphor to describe the organisation, their interpretations and composite of the metaphor were significantly different. This particular metaphorically elicited image proved to be a valuable tool for exploring the similarities and differences in employees' perceptions about the organisation's culture.

A family metaphor was used by all the participants, to describe the organisation. *"I think I would describe it as a family, as a group of family members, I think because we are so small and you really get to know people on a personal level, so I would really compare this to a family"* The notion of a "family culture" came out strongly and particular reference was made to the belief that *"this is what this company is all about, really a deep caring about people", "going the extra mile", and being able to "bring your personal problems to work"*. *"It's also a very supportive environment, they really try to cater for individual needs and support individuals in their own personal lives, you can bring your personal problems to work but also with boundaries but there is a huge amount of support if you are going through a hard time to get support from people to help you do your work, so from that point of view it is amazing, I think it is a very rare thing in an organisation at the level that it is done here"*. This depiction of the organisation is related to Pheysey's (1993) support culture, which is based on friendliness, respect and inclusion. The basic premise of this approach is that employees will work because they have strong ties to the social unit or organisation, which came out very strongly in the interviews. *"But all in all I think it's a very good place to work, I*

think because of that supportive culture, it's easy to come to work because you know that you are validated for who you are and people respect you...".

The integrative culture of the organisation can be attributed to the fact that it is small but this does not at all mean that all small organisations have an integrative culture. In fact by using the family image to describe the organisation it became evident that ambiguity and ambivalence emerged. The above discussion is written from an integration perspective and thus the depiction of the unified aspects of the organisations culture was discussed. But within the analysis of the interview transcripts it became evident that there were contradictory understandings of the organisation's culture and thus a differentiation perspective will now be adopted in order to identify and discuss these inconsistent manifestations.

The family metaphor provided scope for the contradictory understandings of the organisation's culture, which is an indication that metaphors do in fact provide valuable insights about the organisation's culture. Even though everyone in the organisation identified the family metaphor to depict the culture of the organisation there were contradictory explanations of how it applied to this particular organisation.

On the one hand the notion that the family metaphor does encompass core positive values of the organisations culture such as support was emphasised, on the hand this "supportive culture" was viewed negatively. *"Especially because you work so closely with everybody on a daily basis, what's great is that you get to know them but also sometimes you have*

to deal with personal issues, which I don't think necessarily belong at the office". This quote illustrates how the interpretation of the organisations culture is not simply uniform but rather contradictory.

Not only are metaphors powerful communicative tools but they are also able to "convey a multitude of interconnected meanings" (Sackmann, 1986, p. 466). Thus, it gave the participants the opportunity and room for conveying ambiguous understandings of their organisations' culture. It is important to remember that different metaphors can be identified by two individuals but they may be referring to the same actions or they may use the same metaphor but relate it to different behaviours. Therefore, the use of the "family" metaphor to describe the organisation will now be looked at from a fragmentation perspective, which takes into account the webs of ambiguity, paradox, and contradictions that emerge when trying to understand the culture of the organisation.

By employing the definition provided by Sathe (1985) and Louis (1985) only shared aspects of cultural manifestations are studied, which is limited and lacks some of the complexities related to the understanding of organisations culture. Mill's (1988) definition of organisational culture differs in that it includes aspects of conflict and contradiction in which class and gender are vital dynamics. The participants recognised that the family metaphor might be a metaphor that springs to mind best because it links back to the shared aspects of the organisation's culture but within this metaphor there may be problems with relating to it uncritically. Even though all the participants used the family metaphor their perceptions and feelings about how it related to the organisation

were slightly different and some saw it as being positive, supportive, caring, belonging, and building strong relationships while others viewed it much more negatively.

“...it is kind of a family culture, in a sense. Because that’s the way they’ve structured the organisation, with a very small number of people on the top and a large lower level with one or two coming in at that level and it works well. It’s a good business model”.

“I think in terms of the supportive culture. I think all of us at some point had a disaster in our lives and in terms of that been very supportive, other things have happened and I think in a bigger organisation there’s no scope for that. We really try to support what people are going through and try and accommodate that as you can”.

All the participants referred to the nurturing and supportive element of the family metaphor, however, some saw it as being positive while others saw it as being a negative and others saw it as being both, thus illustrating the ambiguity. One of the major problems of this metaphor was the assigning of roles mainly relating to the “parent-child” relationship.

“In terms of family I want to make sure that I don’t say to you this is a family. I think if I talk about a family it’s a sense of belonging. It’s a grouping of similar, like minded individuals that decide that there’s a certain way of doing things. So maybe we must rather call it a grouping because I think what the difference is from a family at home and from what this sense of belonging is here is that we are here to do one thing and that is to

make business happen, in other words to make money and to be fulfilled but we first need to make money. So you can say which one first but this is definitely not a family. So I can't care for you as your mother because then we're not following the rules in terms of how business works. Although there is care, there is sense of belonging. We fight with one another, we stand together, all those things that is healthy principles. There is that dynamic (parent/child relationships) but from my point of view I'm ruining it because it's not healthy".

"A metaphor that you will also hear from other people, although I am uncomfortable with that metaphor but maybe, that is to describe (the company) as a family, given the relationships, strong relationships that we have, I think, my perception is, I think a lot of people get a lot from an organisation where there is strong relationships, people care for one another, where we will almost go out our way or go an extra mile, to try and accommodate. The dilemma is however, with using a family metaphor..., if you take that metaphor to its fullest consequence, within the South African context, there is a father, there are children and children mustn't be heard and from that perspective the metaphor doesn't work for me".

These ambiguous interpretations or expressions of the organisations culture were mainly elicited by means a metaphor, specifically the family metaphor and thus using a qualitative approach certainly provided much more insight as to the perceptions of the organisations culture, not just in trying to understand how one metaphor can be applied but to allow participants to express what this metaphor means and how it applies to the

organisations culture, which would not have been elicited if a quantitative approach were adopted.

Although a family metaphor was used by all the participants not only were their interpretation different in terms of how the metaphor applied to this particular organisation but they also had different images of this metaphor. Particularly, with reference to the composition of the family, one participant depicted the various organisational members adopting the roles of “*mother, father, and children*”, while another member stated that there is a “*mother, father, uncle, older sisters, and a baby*”. These findings illustrate how various employees drew on the same metaphor to depict the culture of the organisation but had various interpretations of how these relationships shaped how things were done in the organisation.

Even though there were differences in the employees perceptions of how this metaphor applied they ‘turned into a family’. “*I think this mainly speaks to the culture eliminate, what happened over the past few years, it has been very patriarchal, with (Person B) being the father figure. He took on a lot of young people, we were young when we joined and we were young interns and there was this, not even old, wise man and I think we developed a lot of that father figure relationship which was good for our learning and development but it was also unhealthy because you don’t challenge as much as you can, you almost stop trying to think about challenging...*”. They became the image, father-child by adopting the submissive role that children would normally assume. Within organisations, this “sense of becoming the image demonstrates the power of the metaphor

when searching for common ground among differing viewpoints or fractions” (Ricketts & Seiling, 2003, p.4). Therefore, even though the parent-child relationship is not welcomed in the organisation, it is there and using a family metaphor elicited this relationship.

By viewing an organisation as a patriarchal family, organisations encourage male domination and women are expected to take on roles that require nurturing for example. Men are given roles that allow them to be assertive whereas women were expected to take on roles that were passive (Morgan, 1986). Organisations could be conceptualised as a family, with the father taking on the dominant role and the employees being the children who have to follow the rules. This type of operation encourages individuals to depend on one another and to rely on others for solutions to problems. The fatherly role is also observed in instances where individuals helping newer members in the organisation, to show them the ropes. The patriarchal view of organisations could be criticised for creating a sense of helplessness and reliance on authority (Morgan, 1986). On the contrary matriarchal organisations tend adopt the type of values where “nurturing and networking replace authority and hierarchy as the dominant mode of integration” (Morgan, 1986, p. 212). In organisations where a patriarchal approach is adopted women are placed in a position of subservience. This metaphorical depiction of organisations is understood in dichotomous terms – either patriarchal or matriarchal – which may not always be the case. In other words one may find that the two views may in fact be present in a single organisation and thus illustrating the complex nature of organisations. Even though Participant D described the organisation as being patriarchal, it reflected the

gender of the person in charge but by using the “*dog with her pups*” image, values of nurturing and support were emphasised which is in line with the values of a matriarchal organisation.

Table 1.1 provides an outline of the metaphors/images elicited from the participants as well as their feelings about their current organisational culture.

Table 1: Images of the Organisation’s Culture

Person	Metaphors	Experience
Participant A (F)	Chemistry & Family	Negative view of family dynamics
Participant B (F)	Living Organism & Family	Positive view of family dynamics
Participant C (F)	Puzzle & Family	Positive view of family dynamics
Participant D (F)	Dogs & Family	Negative & Positive view of family Dynamics
Participant E (M)	Living Cell & Family	Negative view of family dynamics
Participant F (M)	Village & Family	Negative view of family dynamics
Participant G (M)	Cell & Family	Negative & Positive view of family Dynamics

At face value the extensiveness of the responses, and the conflicting nature of several of the descriptions, demonstrated the type of “richness” that is expected from the type of semi-structured interviews conducted in this study. However, if the principal features and properties which represent those resemblances among the metaphor and the organisation

are explored a pattern emerges. As will be demonstrated below, a deeper analysis of the various images demonstrates a relatively high degree of metaphorical consistency.

In relation to the methodological approach adopted, which was purely qualitative, the research could have been enriched by including quantitative research methods. If a purely quantitative approach were adopted, the collection of data may have taken twenty-minutes but by using a qualitative approach much more time was spent on setting the interviews, conducting the interviews, transcribing the interviewees verbatim, and doing a content analysis. Thus, one may question whether or not it was worth it. The initial research process changed more than once and this is typical of such an explorative study. On the one hand a rich amount of information was gained by doing the interviews and the results indicated that Martin's (2002) informal definition of organisational culture, which included all three theoretical standpoints, namely: the integration, the differentiation, and the fragmented, proved to be useful when interpreting the results which provided insight as to how organisational culture manifested in the organisation. The metaphorical enquiry adopted in this research did indeed provide both a description of the organisation's culture as well as the participants' emotional reactions about the culture, by the metaphors of images they drew upon.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One limitation of the study is that the sample of interviewees was relatively small. This is a common trade-off in qualitative research. The method used was appropriate, since the intent was to capture depth of understanding rather than breadth at this explorative phase. A related limitation was that data was collected from only one South African organisation. Future research should examine metaphors in a more extensive sample of organisations, using additional languages. Future research should include individuals from organisations in other industries and with a more representative population.

Sample Size

Having only seven people participate in the study had both advantages and disadvantages. An advantage was that all the members of the organisation were interviewed thus everyone's interpretation of the organisations culture could be assessed, which is rare in most research in general and research pertaining to organisational culture. A disadvantage related mainly to the fact that no generalisations can be made, however, can one ever make generalisations in terms of organisational culture. Because even within a small organisation there were ambiguous and ambivalent interpretations of the organisations culture. These research findings are in line with Schneider's (1990, p. 161) assertion that "culture reflects a social construction of reality unique to members of a social unit, and that this uniqueness make it impossible for standardised measures to tap cultural processes".

Sensitisation of Sample

Furthermore the sample used was highly sensitised, due to the nature of the work they were involved in and their academic backgrounds (they all came from a social sciences background – particularly Master’s in Industrial Psychology). Many of the projects they are involved in deal with organisational culture. One of the major implications of this limitation is they may have given “ideal answers” because they were aware about what an ideal organisational culture should be. All the participants were articulate and predominately spoke English; therefore the results may have been different if a sample of non-English speakers or less educated participants were used. Thus, future researchers should consider second language English speakers, which is prevalent in South Africa which has eleven official languages.

Lack of Diversity

In terms of diversity, the organisation was not diverse in terms of race, there was only one Indian man, thus by including a discussion on how different races differed in their interpretation of the study would have led to problems of confidentiality, which would have had serious ethical implications.

Organisational Structure

The different organisational levels within the organisation also differed from traditional organisational structures found in South Africa and this is attributed to the constant changes the organisation experienced in terms of size. Thus, by using a different sample the results of the study may have changed significantly.

Type of Analysis Utilised

Another limitation of the study is related to the method used to elicit the information.

Instead of asking the participants what metaphors or images best describe their organisation, other methods of uncovering their use of metaphorical language may have been more valuable. For example, instead of using content analysis, the researcher could have used discourse analysis to analyse the organisation's texts, such as documents as well as listen to the discourses used in meetings.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

It can be concluded that metaphors are indeed a useful linguistic tool which accesses a deeper understanding of the complex nature of organisational culture, as argued by numerous authors (Morgan, 1985; Krantz, 1990; Sackmann, 1986, Oswick & Montgomery, 1999). The above results and discussion illustrate the complex nature of the organisations culture and by using metaphors elicited from the participant's one was able to gain much more insight into the culture of the organisation, which would not have been possible if a quantitative approach were adopted.

The metaphors elicited from the employees also could be translated into a visual form (pictures) as a tool for exploring the similarities and differences in employee perceptions of organisational culture. Pictures of a family, of a village, of an organ, of molecules, of a family of dogs, and of a puzzle, certainly did provide valuable insight into the similarities and differences in the participant's perceptions of the organisations culture. These varying perceptions were highlighted in the three theoretical perspectives of the case studies organisational cultural manifestations.

By exploring the culture of the organisation through the lenses of the three theoretical perspectives; the integration, differentiation, and the fragmentation perspectives, one could see how diverse employees on one hand share perceptions of the organisational culture while on the other hand disagree. This study has involved only one organisation.

Thus it should be regarded as much as a test of the methodology as a study that produces meaningful results. Further studies are required to draw general conclusions.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

I would like you to tell me about this organisation.

- 1) Tell me about this organisation. (What is it like to work here, tell me about the way things are done around here?)
- 2) Describe the organisation as an object or a living thing? or
- 3) Could you please draw a picture of what this organisation is like?
- 4) Can you tell me a story of an incident/event that took place in this organisation that you think really reflects how this organisation operates and treats people?
- 5) Describe how it feels to be part of this organisation?
- 6) Is there anything you would like to see change/transformed in this organisation?
- 7) You described the organisation as _____ in (Q2). How would you change/adapt this image/picture of the organisation?
- 8) Does that take into account everything or would you like to add anything?

Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet (Qualitative/Interview Based)



School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050,
Johannesburg, South Africa
Tel: 083 337 3208
Email: cleodene@yahoo.com

Good day

My name is Cleodene Van Rayne, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters degree in Industrial Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is that of organisational culture and I would like to ask you questions on how you see this organisation. The aim of this research is to develop a scale of organisational culture. Once these individual interviews have been analysed a focus group consisting of individuals from this organisation will be asked to give their opinion about the images of organisational culture that have emerged from the individual interviews. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Participation in this research will entail being interviewed by myself, at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will last for approximately one hour. With your permission this interview will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy and with your permission verbatim quotes will be used in the research report. Participation is voluntary, and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. In addition to the individual interviews this research will entail being part of a focus group, who will be interviewed at a time and place that is convenient for the group. The interview will last for approximately one hour. No information that could identify you will be included in the research report. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation at any time, and will only be processed by myself. You may refuse to answer any questions you would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point.

If you choose to participate in the study please e-mail your details to the following e-mail address cleodene@yahoo.com. Please indicate if you would like to take part in the individual interviews of the focus group.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in the study. This research will contribute both to a larger body of knowledge on organisational culture and the development of a scale measuring organisational culture. A brief summary of the findings will be presented to the organisation.

Yours sincerely,

Cleodene Van Rayne

Appendix C: Consent Form (Interview)

I _____ consent to being interviewed by
Cleodene Van Rayne for her study on Images of Organisational Culture. I understand
that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and
my responses will remain confidential.

Signed _____

Appendix D: Consent Form (Recording)

I _____ consent to my interview with Cleodene Van Rayne for her study on Images of Organisational Culture being tape-recorded. I understand that:

- The tapes and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation at any time, and will only be processed by the researcher.
- All tape recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete.
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.
- Verbatim quotes may be used in the research report.

Signed _____